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Shahriar, A. and Bruen, T. (2019). Struggles for Empowerment, Higher Education Stories from East and West. London: UCL Institute of Education Press. ISBN: 9781858568966

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This book explores the real stories of struggles experienced by students from two rural provinces, the region of Sindh in Pakistan and Connaught in the west of Ireland, as they access and progress in higher education. It draws on the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital, habitus and field to analyse the students' very personal narratives. The research in this book *'deals with the culture of two different regions on the world map, cultures that differ from East to West; yet the similarities of experiences are remarkable and enhance our understanding of deprivations across the world.'*

The book is laid out in four parts as follows:

Part One: Family and society

Chapter 1: *'Sindh, Pakistan: The people within their context'* by Ambreen Shahriar provides a detailed and informative overview of the history of Sindh, focusing on traditional social divisions and their current impact on lives, as well as religious differences, language preferences of different groups in Sindh, inequalities in education and family life. This will be of interest to those who wish to learn about the history and social context of Sindh in Pakistan. It effectively sets the 'Sindh' educational scene for the following chapters in the book.

Chapter 2: *'Ireland and education in context'* by Teresa Bruen discusses historical educational provision in Ireland, widening educational participation in education, albeit not universally so, and the motivational factors affecting mature student educational participation (23+ years on commencement of first year of study) to enter higher education. These are: *'personal development, altruism, human capital theory and economic rationalism'*. So too, this chapter sets the 'Irish' educational scene for the subsequent chapters in the book. Similar to chapter 1, it will be of interest to those who wish to learn about the history of, and current educational provision in Ireland.

Part Two: Our trajectories

In chapter 3: *'How my journey through Pakistan began'* (Shahriar) and in chapter 4: *'How my own journey began'* (Bruen), the authors share their personal impetus to study and their own research pathways. The positionality of each researcher within their research is carefully considered and discussed. Shahriar highlights that *'I write about my own background and experiences, and how these and my presence during the study might have affected my findings'*, while Bruen emphasises that *'my chapters in the book highlight my personal path, give direction to the research and demonstrate how, in the realm of qualitative research, the personal threads through the professional.'*

Part Three: Giving voice to the unheard

Chapter 5: *'Making a better life: The voices from rural Sindh'*. In this chapter, Shahriar examines the narratives of five research participants (mixed gender) to reveal that *'underlying patterns in the overall stories of the participants in her research connect them with each other'* and how *'self'*, *'family'* and *'society'* (norms, mores and social structure) are inextricably linked in participants' lives in Sindh. In this way, the complexity of lives being lived is captured and presented to a reader.

Chapter 6: *'Striving for improvement: Hearing the voices of mature students'*. Here, Bruen explores the experience of six mature students (mixed gender) in third level education in Connaught in Ireland. Here also, *'self'*, *'negative experiences of primary and secondary school'*, *'relationships with teachers'*, *'struggle'*, *'family and relationships'*, and *'society'* arise as key issues for participants. These all intertwine in participants' lives to shape their experiences of education.

Part Four: Towards emancipation and empowerment

Chapter 7: *'Understanding the stories from Sindh'*. This chapter explores Bourdieu's theory of practice as it applies to Sindh students. Shahriar shows how determination and a drive to overcome adversity powerfully changed life outcomes for participants.

Chapter 8: *'Interpreting the stories from rural Ireland.'* Drawing also on Bourdieu's work, Bruen examines how social inequality affects the lives of mature students within higher education, providing an informed insight into the social reality of this experience, as well as the strategies students use to overcome educational adversity.

Epilogue

In the epilogue, both authors draw attention to the fact that those who participated *'in our studies gained insights into the ways class and gender inequalities are perpetuated and discovered ways of subverting the process'* and how higher education can be used as an instrument of social change. They acknowledge that their work presents *'participants as individuals, but they should not be thought of as universal'*. Yet, in the student narrative accounts which they present from Sindh, Pakistan, and Connaught, Ireland, we see how participants share *'similar issues in their personal lives'*, especially in terms of access to and progression in education. In addition, Shahriar and Bruen point to the need for further higher educational research in areas, such as the significance of religion and ethnicity.

This book can be read in a number of ways: in chronological order, comparing both studies and accounts, or reading each of the chapters by one author together. I chose the former approach. Doing so, it quickly became evident that *'issues of education, gender and social class and concepts of culture are salient in accessing higher education'* across jurisdictions. The authors' reflective writing, their narrative analysis and the way in which they contextualise emergent themes very effectively brings the reader into both of their social worlds and that of their research participants. Thus, the book is very engaging and insightful. *'Struggles for Empowerment, Higher Education Stories from East and West'* by Ambreen Shahriar and Teresa Bruen will be an important read for undergraduate and postgraduate students in the areas of ethnography, narrative inquiry, qualitative research generally, transnational cultural studies, as well as the social science disciplines generally. It will also be very informative for academics, researchers and those working in support services in third level education.